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Idaho Transportation Department

Today's News Briefs

Source: Idaho Statesman (Boise)

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2/27/2004

Sharing her suffering

One year ago today, Natalie Marti's husband and daughter were killed by a drunken driver. Now she's telling her story, hoping it can save lives.

If you're convicted of a DUI in Boise, a judge might order you to hear Natalie Marti talk about how a drunken driver killed her husband and baby daughter.

One year ago today Shawn Marti, 24, and 5-month-old Sage died when a drunken driver, going the wrong way on Interstate 84, slammed into the family car.

Natalie Marti was in a coma for about two weeks and was not well enough to hear that Shawn and Sage had died until that April.

Now she wants to tell others about her ordeal. She has joined a Mothers Against Drunk Driving Victim Impact Panel. In spring, she'll begin talking to people convicted of a first or second DUI about the devastation caused by drunken driving.

"Her story is huge," MADD victim advocate Aleshea Lind said.

Natalie doesn't remember the crash. She uses a three-ring binder filled with graphic photos of the family's crushed Toyota and the other driver's pickup to help her piece together what happened. She explains what happened with a matter-of-fact tone. They were driving home to Caldwell after watching Shawn's younger sister perform in a Boise High School production of "Oklahoma!" at about 10:30 p.m. They were heading west at about 65 mph, approaching Caldwell when they were struck head-on by an eastbound pickup truck going about 100 mph in a westbound lane.

Looking at the crash photos and photos of herself in a coma at Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center doesn't rattle the 24-year-old Boise woman.

"If I had some memory of that day ... but since I don't, it's like getting all the pieces together," Natalie said. "I want to know the answers."

Natalie is reassembling her life, too. She returned to her part-time job as a hairdresser last summer. She lives with her parents, Dee and Mary Cazier, in the southwest home where she grew up.

The love story won't end

Images of Shawn and Sage are impossible to avoid at the Cazier home. The couple's wedding portrait is displayed in the home's front room, along with other photos of the couple and their daughter. Natalie wears her wedding ring on her finger and her husband's wedding ring on a chain around her neck. A bracelet on her wrist spells out "Sage" in beads.

She made a quilt from pieces of Shawn's old T-shirts as a Christmas gift for his parents.

"I cuddle up with it," Shawn's mother, Jennifer Marti, said.

With tears in her eyes, Natalie said she believes she will marry again someday and have more children.

"I love kids, and I want to be a wife and mother again," she said.

She believes she is alive because God has more work for her to do on earth, she said. Jennifer Marti said her daughter-in-law's service on the MADD panel will help her do that work.

"I think this has really given her a great purpose and opportunity to share their love story," she said. Ready for independence

Natalie left the hospital in late April 2003. She began driving a month later, even though doctors warned her family it could take six months before she'd be able to get behind the wheel.

An occupational therapist rode with Natalie to make sure her motor skills were sharp enough for her to safely drive again. Her mother and sisters were in their front yard when Natalie surprised them by driving past their home.

"We were jumping around and screaming," her mother, Mary Cazier, said. "From the day she got out of the hospital she wanted her independence. She didn't ask for it. She just did it."

Two months ago Natalie called the MADD office in Boise and told them she wanted to get involved.

She went to the Statehouse and sat at the MADD booth Feb. 3, handing out information and talking to lawmakers and others who passed by.

"I think it's the most important thing we can do to bring a face to the crime and let legislators see them as we see them," Lind said.

In 2005, MADD will lobby to make a third DUI a felony if it occurs within 15 years of the previous offense. Right now, a third DUI is a felony only if it occurs within five years of the last conviction.

Next week Natalie will begin training to join the victims panel; she likely will begin speaking on the panel in April or May, Lind said. Panels meet on the first Wednesday of every month at the MADD office in Boise. They include between 40 and 50 DUI offenders and four speakers who each have about 30 minutes to share their story.

Natalie said she will bring photos of Shawn, Sage and the crash site to share during the panel. She believes that her story has the power to keep people from getting behind the wheel after they've had a few drinks.

"If I had done that, hearing someone tell me about something like this, that would stop me from drinking and driving," she said.

Jennifer Marti said she is impressed by her daughter-in-law's interest in MADD and hopes it will have an impact on those who consider driving drunk.

"All of us have suffered, but if we can have some meaning to it, then it's not all for nothing."